

Security Sector Interactions with Children in Marine Piracy

A Reflection Paper for the 2013 IDRC / Coady Canadian Learning Forum

by Dr. Shelly Whitman, Carl Conradi and Sam Holland

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

Summary of Research Project

Name(s) of Researchers	Dr. Shelly Whitman (Executive Director) – shelly@childsoldiers.org Carl Conradi (Programme Officer) – carl@childsoldiers.org Sam Holland (Researcher) – sam@childsoldiers.org
Organization	The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative
Research Project Title	Security Sector Interactions with Children in Marine Piracy
Location of research	East Africa (Djibouti, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania) West Africa (Sierra Leone, Nigeria) – If Funding Is Available
Dates research conducted	International Roundtable: 21-23 October 2013 Somalia Contact Group Plenary Meeting: 10-14 November 2013 Ongoing
Partner(s)	The Dalhousie Marine Piracy Project (DMPP) The Resilience Research Centre
Funder(s)	The TK Foundation Dalhousie University's Office of the President
Types of research methods used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative and qualitative questionnaires • Focus groups • Scenario-based roundtable workshops • Academic and practitioners' conferences
E-Links	Whitman, S., Williamson, H., Sloan, M. & Fanning, L. (2012). Dalhousie Marine Piracy Project: "Children and Youth in Marine Piracy – Causes, Consequences and the Way Forward." (Marine Affairs Programme Technical Report #5). http://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/images/faculty/science/marine-affairs-program/Technical_series/MAP%20Technical%20Report%20%235.pdf
Did or will your research project lead to a second phase?	Yes. Following the project's initial research and advocacy phase (which is detailed in the abstract above), the Dallaire Initiative will design and facilitate scenario-based training with various maritime security sector audiences, with the aforementioned protocol and handbook serving as the foundational pedagogical tools.

Origins of the Research Project

In early 2012, the Dalhousie Marine Piracy Project (DMPP) launched a broad, three-part study to explore the causes and consequences of contemporary maritime piracy. The purpose of this investigation was to identify and develop new strategies for combating maritime piracy across the globe. Dr. Shelly Whitman, Executive Director of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative and affiliate of the DMPP, was requested to produce the study's socio-economic module.

The Dallaire Initiative elected to pursue this line of research because *no security sector body currently possesses clear doctrinal guidance on how to manage interactions with child pirates*. As a Dalhousie University-based security sector organisation that has previously assisted in the creation of rules of engagement (ROE) and standard operating procedures (SOP) for land-based forces that must engage with child soldiers, the Dallaire Initiative is exceedingly well-placed to conduct such an investigation.

When the final paper was published, one of its major recommendations pertained to the phenomenon of child maritime piracy. It was suggested that the *specific* program of children's involvement in piratical activity could serve as a popular "entry point" into the *general* problem of piracy worldwide – insofar as children are of fundamental concern to all affected stakeholders. Indeed, the Dallaire Initiative hypothesized that if the international community were able to enforce a prohibition on the use of children for criminal, piratical purposes, it would go a long way towards preventing piracy as a whole.

Following the study, the Dallaire Initiative began to research the various interactions that security sector actors – including navies, Private Marine Security Companies (PMSCs), law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities – might have with child pirates. These interactions could be as benign as a conversation with a suspected child pirate, or as life-threatening as an attempted hijacking.

Purpose of the Research Project

Despite often being the first point of contact for a child pirate outside of his or her criminal gang, security-sector actors are seldom invited to participate in – and are seldom informed of their responsibilities to effect – child protection. This lack of engagement has meant that their approach to managing child pirate interactions has been spontaneous, rudimentary and frequently dangerous.

For example, in the absence of clear SOPs concerning the restraint, detention, interview and transfer of child pirates, many security sector actors – including the Canadian navy – have opted to pursue a strategy of “catching and releasing” children who are apprehended at sea. Presumably, their intention has been to avoid the legal and ethical ambiguities associated with assuming custody of child prisoners. Yet whenever a child pirate is caught and then released, it signals to adult pirate commanders that children are impervious to the law and that they are therefore a highly desirable strategic asset.

In light of the recommendations made by the DMPP’s 2012 study and the doctrinal gap that has been identified within maritime security sector ROE/SOP, the purpose of the Dallaire Initiative’s research project on child piracy is fivefold:

1. To determine the approximate prevalence of child maritime piracy off the coasts of East and West Africa;
2. To identify the various factors that place children at elevated risk of recruitment by pirate gangs;
3. To detail the methods by which adult pirates recruit children;
4. To create a prescribed protocol for the ethical restraint, detention, interview and transfer of apprehended child pirates, with the intention of influencing global doctrine;
5. To uncover good practices that may have been developed *ad hoc* when security sector actors have been forced to engage with child pirates in the past.

As mentioned, there is currently no code of conduct pertaining to the maintenance of children’s rights at sea. Nevertheless, some navies *do* have ROE/SOP for the effective restraint, detention, interview and transfer of captured *adult* pirates. The Dallaire Initiative’s research and subsequent recommendations will be influenced by these various protocols, by child-specific standards that are upheld by security forces on land and by relevant international legal conventions (e.g. the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, etc.).

Research Excellence and Child Maritime Piracy

The Dallaire Initiative conducts its work along three mutually reinforcing tracks: research, advocacy and training. All research orchestrated by the Dallaire Initiative must directly enhance its ability to advocate at high levels and to deliver superior security sector training on child soldiering/child maritime piracy. Because of this unique *modus operandi*, the Dallaire Initiative gauges excellence within its own research according to its rigour, its power to influence policy, its ability to strengthen efforts of community-level capacity building and its inclusivity (i.e. the extent to which beneficiaries themselves are encouraged to participate in the research process).

In terms of the research excellence framework proposed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Dallaire Initiative is particularly interested in three criteria:

1. Relevance to the needs of communities and/or other stakeholders

If security sector actors do not feel that the Dallaire Initiative's training is of practical use of them, then the research informing the organisation's curriculum has failed to meet its primary objective. As such, the Dallaire Initiative seeks to guarantee the relevance of its research by inviting security sector actors to participate in all data collection processes.

For instance, in October 2013, the Dallaire Initiative facilitated a three-day roundtable on child pirate ROE. This event brought together naval and PMSC personnel from across the globe, who were then asked to assess and validate a set of proposed ROE/SOP using five different scenarios that were designed in collaboration with the Canadian Forces Maritime Warfare Centre.

However, while working through these scenarios, it was determined that the Dallaire Initiative's ROE were too nuanced to be of any practical use. Unlike land-based confrontations with child soldiers, it is both impractical and unadvisable for security sector actors to distinguish between adult pirates and child pirates during firefights at sea. While land-based forces assess threat according to the behaviour of individuals, sea-based forces are necessarily obliged to assess threat according to the behaviour of entire skiffs. Whether children are present on any given skiff is nearly impossible to ascertain in advance; and in the absence of such critical information, security sector actors cannot be expected to employ a competing set of child-specific ROE.

In response, the Dallaire Initiative has shifted its focus towards after-action SOPs – specifically those that pertain to the restraint, detention, interview and transfer of children

captured at sea. The shift in focus demonstrates how rigorous research can be responsive to the stakeholders' real needs, capacities and experiences.

Once the Dallaire Initiative has drafted its final detention protocol, it will be enshrined in both a security sector handbook and a training curriculum. During each subsequent training session, the Dallaire Initiative will continue to solicit anecdotes and suggestions from maritime security sector actors who have actually encountered child pirates in the past. Their intelligence – and the responses they provide in post-training evaluative questionnaires – will influence future iterations of the proposed protocol. This example illustrates how data collection allow us to refine our core outputs on an annual basis to ensure that our advocacy and training efforts remain at the cutting edge.

2. Impact upon practice

The Dallaire Initiative strives to be a global leader in security sector training within the child soldier/child pirate domain. By accumulating data that clearly illustrate the security dimensions of child soldiering and child piracy, the Dallaire Initiative helps to underscore the importance of having security sector actors properly trained in the practical application of child protection procedures.

Indeed, it is the Dallaire Initiative's hope that as the international community becomes more cognisant of the security dimensions associated with child soldiering/child piracy, child-specific ROE and SOP will be incorporated into doctrine; drilled during pre-deployment and induction training; and mainstreamed throughout the globe. Any research that is conducted to demonstrate the unique security concerns posed by child soldiers and child pirates should contribute to an overall paradigm shift, whereby the practice of security sector child protection is both strengthened and changed.

Once again, *no maritime security sector actor currently receives training on how to manage interactions with child pirates*. By conducting rigorous research on how security sector actors currently interact with children who are detained at sea (with an eye to creating a trainable set of SOP), the Dallaire Initiative aspires to have a direct and highly influential impact upon the security sector's child protection praxis.

3. Mutual benefit for researchers and practitioners

The Dallaire Initiative considers its research to be an ongoing, dialectical process. Until the phenomena of child soldiering and child maritime piracy are eradicated, the Dallaire Initiative will seek to create innovative, child-specific ROE and SOP for security sector actors, which will be fine-tuned whenever new data is collected during a training session-

cum-focus groups. In this way, the Dallaire Initiative's research efforts continue to benefit both itself and its beneficiaries.

Challenges to Achieving Research Excellence

The Dallaire Initiative has identified four potential obstacles to conducting its research on child maritime piracy that were discussed at the November 2013 Coady/IDRC conference on research excellence.

First, despite it being the locus of maritime piracy in East Africa, the security situation in Galmudug and south-central Somalia is too volatile to justify a research mission in the field. While the Dallaire Initiative is always keen to build indigenous capacity by working with local researchers – many of whom undoubtedly enjoy better access to communities than the Dallaire Initiative itself – the organisation is similarly reluctant to expose its partners to physical risk. When discussing a subject as controversial as child maritime piracy, even Somali collaborators would face some degree of danger; this would be especially true if the researcher were a youth. As such, it is incumbent upon the Dallaire Initiative to devise a research strategy that allows for rigorous data collection in Somalia – and that promotes grassroots participation – whilst at the same time mitigating any undue security concerns.

Second, in communities where piracy is viewed as a legitimate form of community defence, the Dallaire Initiative expects a degree of opposition to its research objectives. In this context, the Dallaire Initiative will have to balance the importance of maintaining research relationships (so as to guarantee the flow of important data) with the ethical imperative to educate these communities on the risks that accrue to children involved in piracy. The Dallaire Initiative has previously encountered a similar paradox while soliciting critical information from community protection militias that employ child soldiers. Fortunately, this past experience should provide some “good practices” for the Dallaire Initiative's child piracy investigation.

Third, while the Dallaire Initiative strives to produce research that is academically rigorous, the secrecy and overall lack of standardisation amongst PMSC reporting mechanisms will make it challenging for researchers to obtain a broad qualitative and quantitative data set on private sector interactions with child pirates. PMSCs have been approached – and several PMSC representatives were invited to the Dallaire Initiative's October roundtable – but transparent communication has been a perennial stumbling block. As such, the Dallaire Initiative may not be able to render as clear an image of PMSC interactions, when compared to those of navies and law enforcement agencies.

Last, it is not yet clear which metrics the Dallaire Initiative will track in order to demonstrate the long-term efficacy and influence of its child piracy research. Ultimately, it is the organisation's objective to precipitate a cultural paradigm shift concerning children's rights at sea. As such, the extent to which navies and PMSCs integrate protocols for child protection into their respective doctrine or Guardcon might offer one potential indicator. Likewise, once the Dallaire Initiative has developed a curriculum on child piracy for maritime security sector actors, the popularity of this training might offer another metric. In the shorter term, however, the Dallaire Initiative will track all mention of child pirates in both academic articles and the media, using tools such as Factiva and Dalhousie University's Social Media Lab. Beyond this, the Dallaire Initiative will have to continue brainstorming reliable research metrics.